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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 5088
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3227
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 5045
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 1324
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0582
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4152
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 9438
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 6739
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO 1250
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3677
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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INSB

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SUBJECT: UVA PROVINCIAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS UPDATE

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES JAMES R. MOORE. REASONS: 1.4 (B, D)

1. (SBU) Summary. Pol Staff visited Badulla and Monaragela Districts in Uva Province to get a sense of the issues and progress of the campaign for the upcoming August 8 provincial elections. The elections are the first since the end of war and are being perceived by many as a testing ground for the President's popularity. It was apparent from the SLFP active campaign efforts that the government is taking no chances on the outcome of the election. End Summary.

Badulla District: Government Works to Woo Estate Tamils, Some Complaints of Intimidation

2. (SBU) In Badulla District, Embassy staff observed campaign posters covering virtually every flat space, convoys of vehicles moving with campaign workers, and at least four different door-to-door canvassing operations. Candidates for both the ruling United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) and the opposition UNP indicated they had spent large sums of their personal funds in order to 'help the people.' At the same time, candidates from all parties indicated that money was not the deciding issue but that candidates would support them based on their personal qualifications and message. A wealthy SLFP candidate stressed that there were no intra-communal problems but admitted that a lack of Tamil language capacity might be an issue. As he observed, there were union issues among the Tamil plantation workers and the lack of Tamil language meant 'they did not always understand things correctly.' Another wealthy SLFP candidate was confident that being a Sinhalese Muslim would allow him to draw from the Muslims in the district but was also anxious to emphasize that there was no real division among the Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslim communities.

3. (C) A wealthy UNP candidate, who was banking on his youth (28 years), political connections, and good deeds to propel him to office, observed that he had received 'some physical pressures' including disruptions of meetings

and physical attacks which left one driver in the hospital. Campaign staff at another UNP candidate's office, an area that has traditionally been UNP territory, were mainly afraid of election-day abuses such as encouraging people not to vote and using fraudulent ballots. According to them, the SLFP had been emphasizing in its campaign that it would protect Sri Lanka against the nefarious efforts of the international community, including the US. A second UNP candidate said he had experienced physical attacks, intimidation, and a lack of police response to his complaints and felt that the pressure he was under was due to the likelihood of his success at the polls. The JVP candidate provided a detailed description of the campaign abuses they had documented, ranging from the abuse of administrative resources to personal pressures.

14. (SBU) A young local government official who supervised 24 villages expressed frustration at the lack of funds he was given to fulfill his responsibilities in the area of roads and other infrastructure. He claimed that 80 percent of most grants went to support administrative costs and only 20 percent made its way to the local level. He said that health and infrastructure needs were a priority. A group of Sinhalese NGO workers emphasized the importance of decreasing communal tensions and improving the capacity of local government workers in the area. In their opinion, the Hill Tamils who work on the tea plantations are deeply afraid and suffer from an ignorance of their rights. They were also anxious to work on minimizing the

COLOMBO 00000781 002 OF 003

tensions between different communities and described their efforts, through Peace Brigades, to prevent the President's victory declaration from escalating tensions.

15. (SBU) The Embassy team also had occasion to visit a Vedda (indigenous Sri Lankan) on the border of a national park in Badulla District. He had no interest, and nor did most Vedda in his opinion, in the political campaign that was occurring all around him. He indicated that he fully respected the national park as belonging to the Government of Sri Lanka but expressed frustration that they were subject to onerous hunting rules and regulations. He expressed a firm belief that their traditions were more sustainable than the government's and asked for assistance in conveying this message to the outside world.

Monaragela District: A Rajapaksa Running,
Little UNP Presence

16. (C) Monaragela District, Sri Lanka's biggest and poorest district, is considered SLFP territory and Embassy staff observed little UNP campaign activity. UNP candidate Gamini De Silva told Poloff that there have been no major incidents of violence, only petty harassment such as covering up or removing UNP posters. Nonetheless, he said, the government has such a major presence in the district that UNP supporters were shying away from campaign events and meetings. He said the SLFP's chief ministerial candidate, Ports and Aviation Minister Chamal Rajapaksa, son Sashindra Rajapaksa, was using ministry resources to fund his campaign, including 250 vehicles belonging to the ports authority. He was confident, however, that UNP supporters would come through at voting time and argued that party loyalties in the district have not changed as a result of the war. He noted that 75-80 percent of the district people were farm laborers and that lack of water was the major political issue in the area. Irrigation schemes built to date have not helped Monaragela District, and poverty in the area has driven many to engage in marijuana cultivation out of desperation, he said.

17. (SBU) A poor villager working at a rural UNP campaign

office told Poloff that there had been no violence in his area because all the villagers knew each other. He said people would stay loyal to the UNP because the government regularly engaged in petty politics. He added that the government's campaign tactics were insulting to people. As an example, he showed Embassy staff a letter from Sashindra Rajapaksa that was sent to each household asking for a list of their needs and concerns that he could address once he was elected. The UNP workers said &people aren't that stupid.8 If the government wanted to address their needs they would have done so over the past several years they have already been in power, he argued. Local shopkeepers told the driver that the government was hiring the popular national band Sunflowers to perform at campaign rallies and paying them 300,000 rupees (USD 2,800) per show. They complained that the government was spending money carelessly when the district had so many real needs. Workers at a rural UNP campaign office told embassy staff that the government was worried about an upcoming campaign visit by UNP heavyweight Sajith Premadasa and had scheduled the Sunflowers to play at the same time as his rally.

18. (C) An official at Sashindra Rajapaksa,s main campaign office told Poloff that the campaign had been peaceful so far, and noted that Sashindra had specifically instructed the campaign workers to keep it that way. He said the people living in areas bordering the East were happy that the war was over and were showing widespread

COLOMBO 00000781 003 OF 003

support for the government, including donating time and resources to the campaign. He argued that this gratitude would overcome any previous party loyalties and predicted that the government would secure 85% of the vote. He said that the JVP had no support in the area and would not win any seats. He added said that water was a main campaign issue for the people, and reported that the government has inaugurated a new irrigation project to address this.

19. (C) The JVP,s Chief Ministerial candidate R.M. Jayawardena told Poloff that the government was ignoring all election rules. He said the government was misusing state resources for Rajapaksa,s campaign and that 10 JVP campaign workers had been attacked. When asked about JVP support levels in the area he said that the JVP had launched a big campaign for two reasons: to improve the JVP,s performance in the area and to sensitize people to important issues. He said the two biggest issues for the JVP were the fact that government has failed to put forward a post- war economic development plan and that the government has failed to provide a long term political solution to the ethnic conflict. He argued that since the end of the war the government has focused only on its own political survival.

110. (C) COMMENT: The elections are the first since the end of war and are being perceived by many as a testing ground for the President's popularity. The extremely active electioneering suggests that the government is taking no chances, despite it being a generally low-priority constituency. The candidacy of Shashindra Rajapaksa is likely part of the Government's broader effort to replace stalwart SLFP members with Rajapaksa loyalists.

MOORE